

DC
VERTIGO

1 of 5
FEB 94

SUGGESTED
FOR MATURE
READERS

A M E R I C A N

BOX

A T A L E O F T H E U N - M E N TM

dave
louapre

vince
locke

A
POST-
MODERN
METAMORPHOSIS.

GAZ • RB

AMERICAN

A T A L E O F T H E U N - M E N

CHAPTER ONE: THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

DAVE LOUAPRE WRITER
CLEM ROBINS LETTERER
SCOTT BABASHAK COVER MODEL
SHELLY ROEBERG COVER PHOTOGRAPHER
KAREN BERGER ASSISTANT EDITOR
ALISA KWITNEY EDITOR
RICHARD BRUNING COVER DESIGNER
DIGITAL CHAMELEON SEPARATIONS
COLORIST
CHUCKRY
CHRIS
ARTIST
VINCE LOCKE
GAY
LEN WEIN AND BERNIE WRIGHTSON CREATED BY
THE UN-MEN



TURNING AND TURNING IN THE WIDENING GYRE
THE FALCON CANNOT HEAR THE FALCONER;
THINGS FALL APART; THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD;
MERE ANARCHY IS LOOSED UPON THE WORLD;
THE BLOOD-DIMMED TIDE IS LOOSED, AND EVERYWHERE
THE CEREMONY OF INNOCENCE IS DROWNED;
THE BEST LACK ALL CONVICTION, WHILE THE WORST
ARE FULL OF PASSIONATE INTENSITY.

W.B. YEATS
(from "The Second Coming")

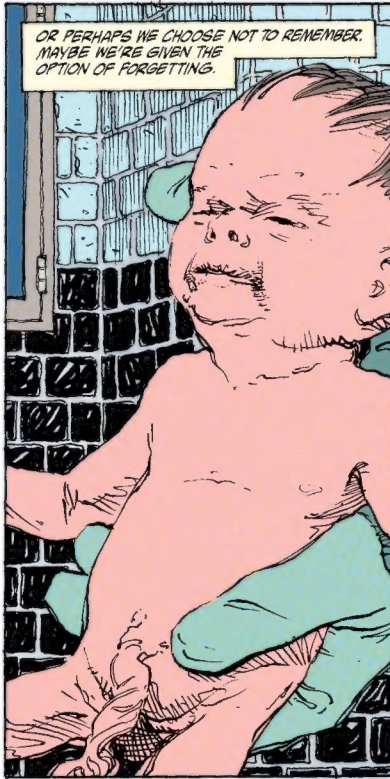


NO ONE REMEMBERS
THEIR BIRTH.

IT IS SAID TO BE THE MOST PAINFUL
MOMENT OF LIFE, AND YET WE CAN'T
RECALL IT.



OR PERHAPS WE CHOOSE NOT TO REMEMBER.
MAYBE WE'RE GIVEN THE
OPTION OF FORGETTING.



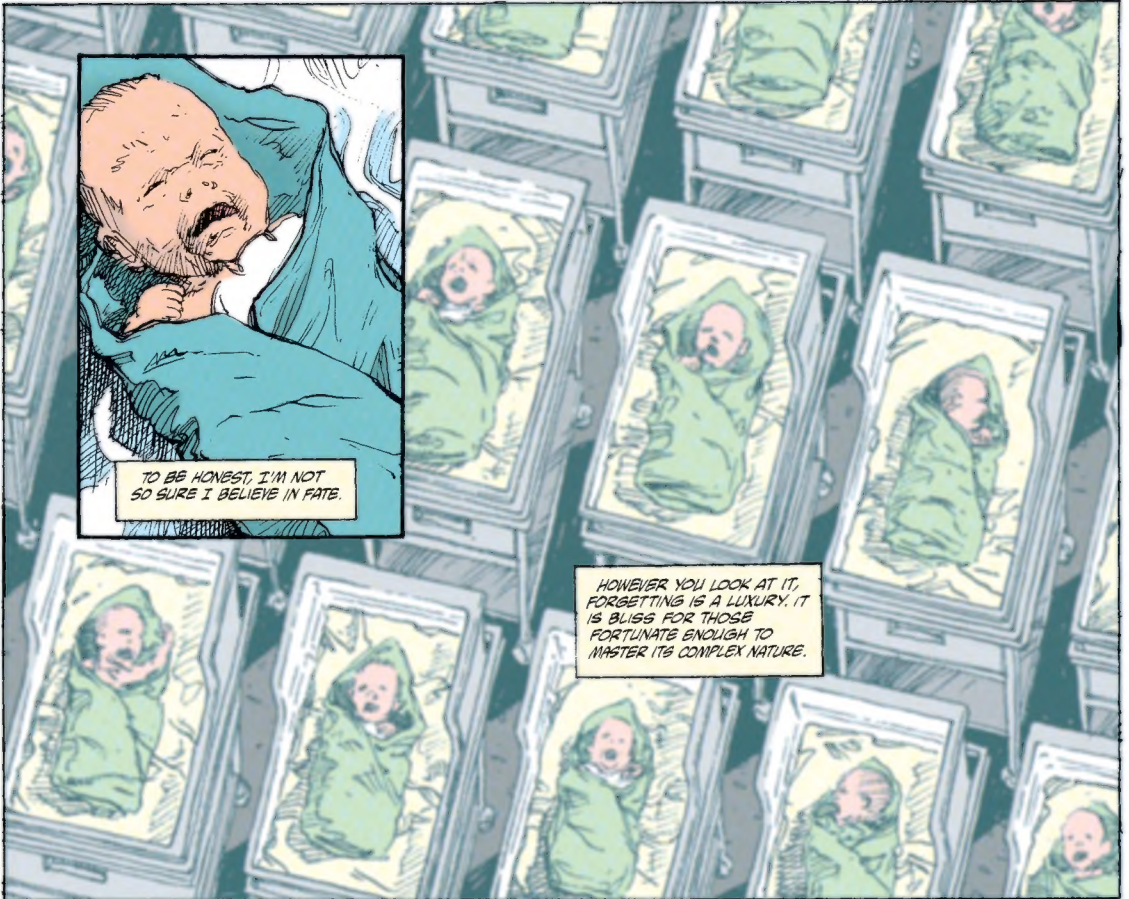
BY WHATEVER IT IS THAT
GUIDES OUR FATE.



TO BE HONEST, I'M NOT
SO SURE I BELIEVE IN FATE.



HOWEVER YOU LOOK AT IT,
FORGETTING IS A LUXURY. IT
IS BLISS FOR THOSE
FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO
MASTER ITS COMPLEX NATURE.





I LOOK AT THE ONES WHO LIVE BELOW, AT THE FOOT OF THESE JAGGED ROCKS.



THEY'VE LIVED WITH PAIN FOR SO LONG THAT IT'S NOT EVEN PAIN ANYMORE, BUT AN UNAVOIDABLE FEELING THAT CONSTANTLY LETS THEM KNOW THEY ARE ALIVE.



IMAGINE HOW NICE IT WOULD BE NOT TO KNOW JUST HOW WRETCHED YOU REALLY ARE.



THE MARROW IN MY BONES, HARDLY HUMAN ANYMORE, IS BLACK WITH RAGE AND RUIN.

I WAS NOT ALWAYS LIKE THIS, BUT THINGS CHANGE.



IT IS THE NATURE OF THE WORLD. IT IS THE BASIS OF HOPE.

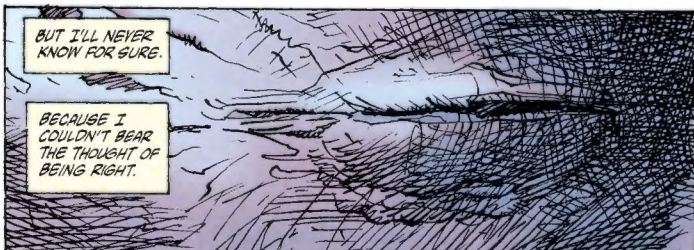
HOPE.

THE WORD SOUNDS STRANGE TO ME NOW.



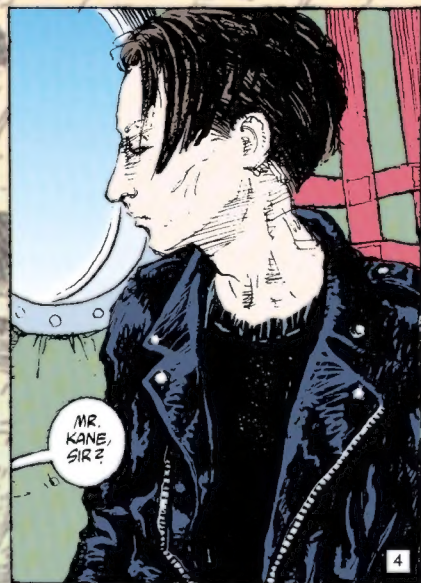
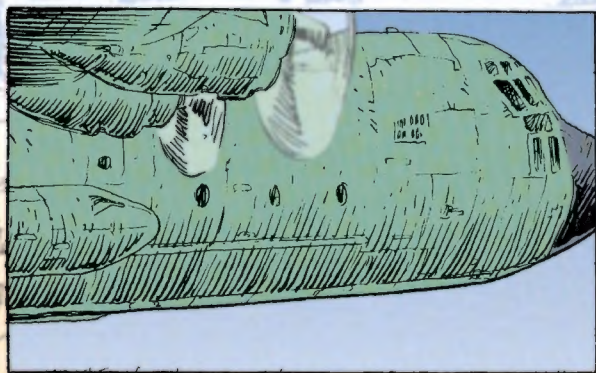
IF I SHOULDED INTO THE CANYON BELOW, I'M CONVINCED THERE WOULD BE NO ECHO.

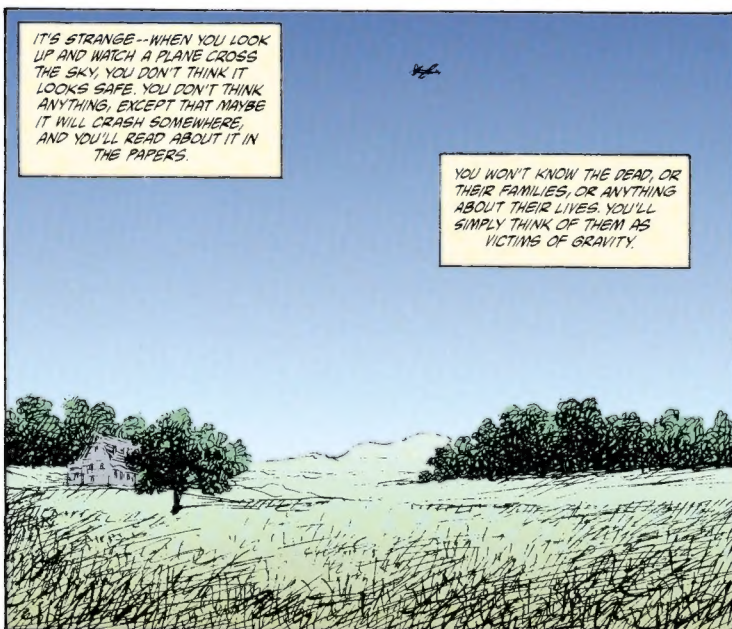
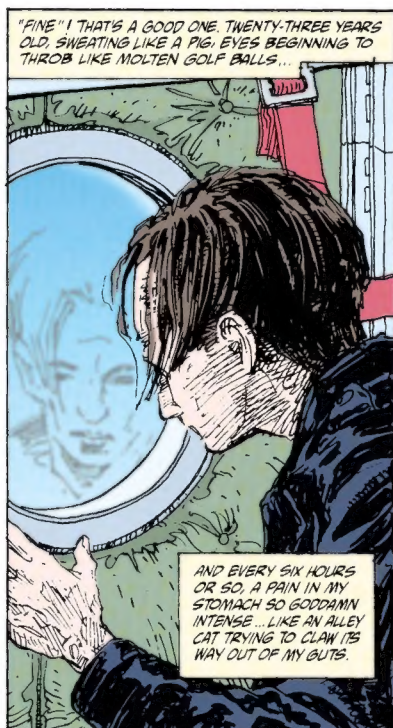
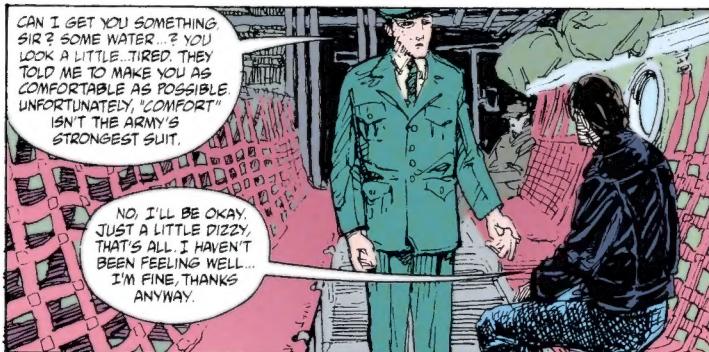
OR IF THERE WAS AN ECHO, IT WOULDN'T BE ONE I COULD HEAR.

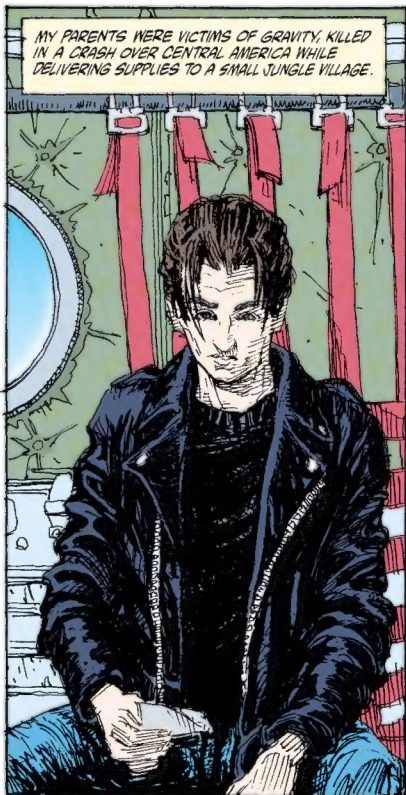


BUT I'LL NEVER KNOW FOR SURE.

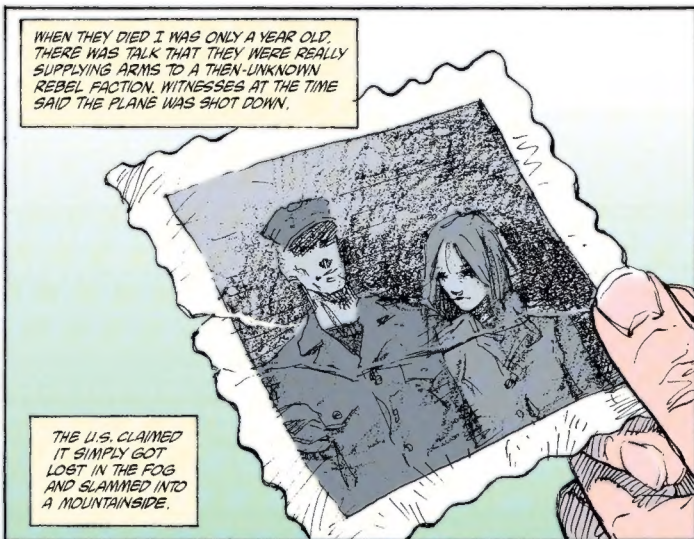
BECAUSE I COULDN'T BEAR THE THOUGHT OF BEING RIGHT.



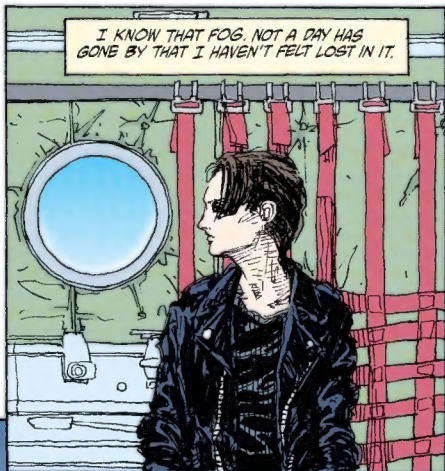




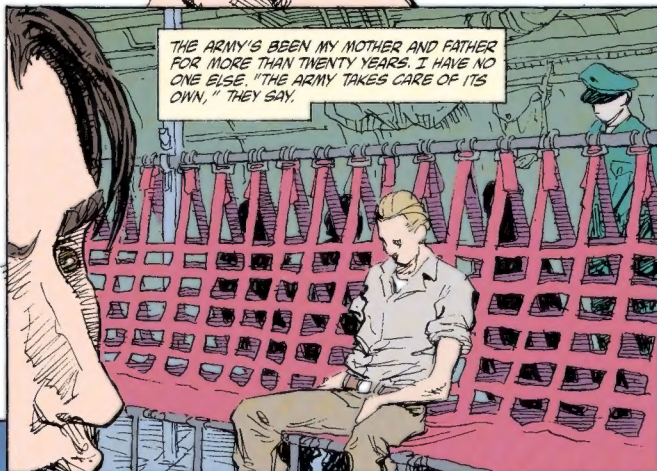
MY PARENTS WERE VICTIMS OF GRAVITY, KILLED IN A CRASH OVER CENTRAL AMERICA WHILE DELIVERING SUPPLIES TO A SMALL JUNGLE VILLAGE.



THE U.S. CLAIMED IT SIMPLY GOT LOST IN THE FOG AND SLAMMED INTO A MOUNTAIN SIDE.



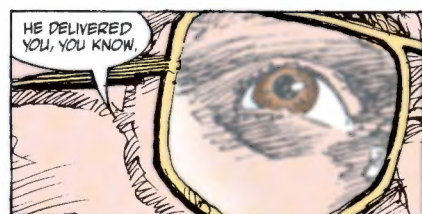
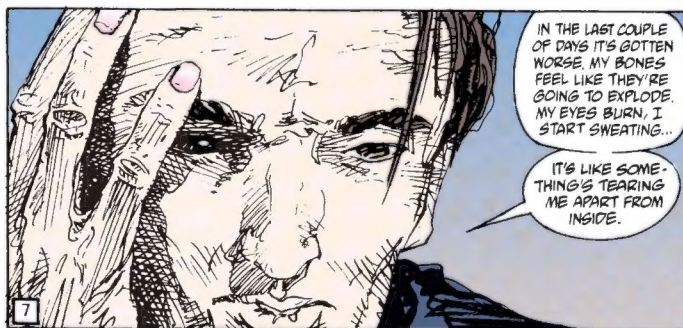
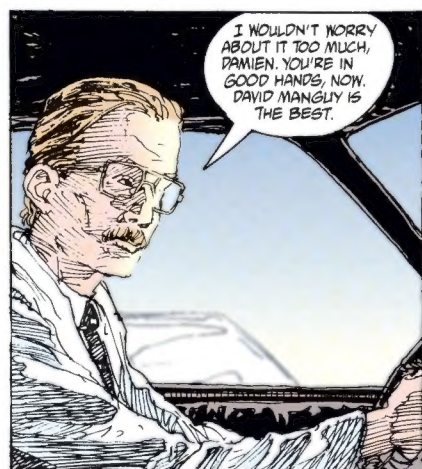
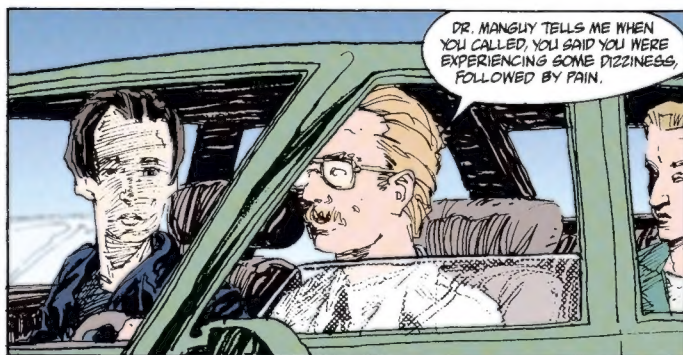
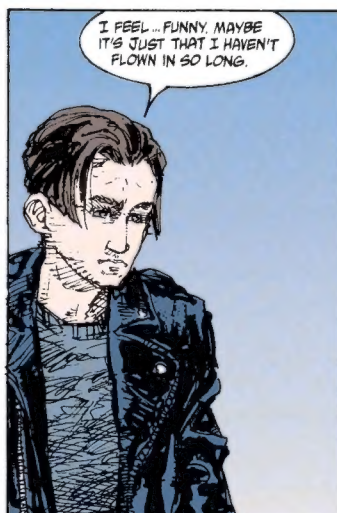
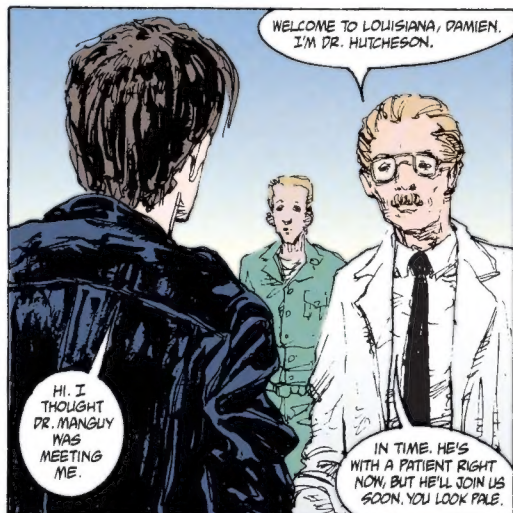
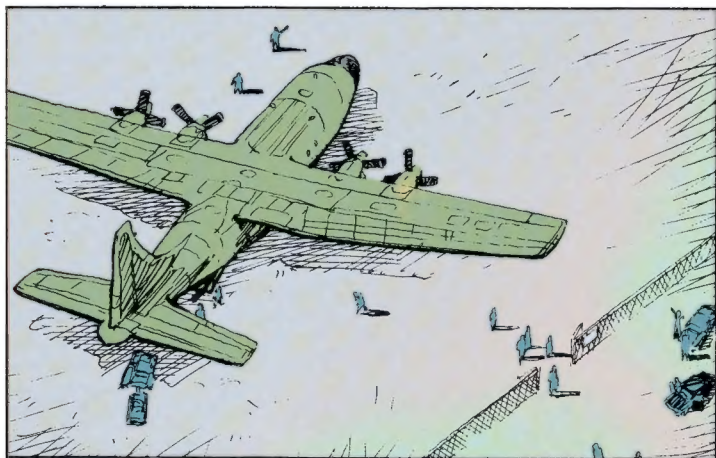
I KNOW THAT FOG. NOT A DAY HAS GONE BY THAT I HAVEN'T FELT LOST IN IT.

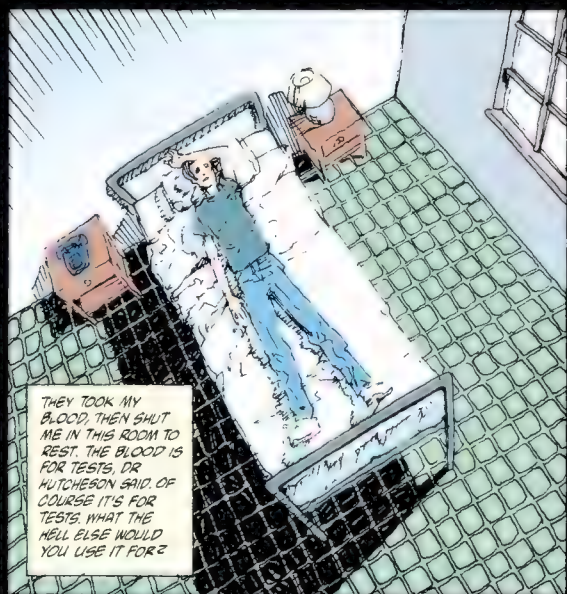


THE ARMY'S BEEN MY MOTHER AND FATHER FOR MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS. I HAVE NO ONE ELSE. "THE ARMY TAKES CARE OF ITS OWN," THEY SAY.

THEY'VE CERTAINLY TAKEN CARE OF ME.







THEY TOOK MY BLOOD, THEN SHUT ME IN THIS ROOM TO REST. THE BLOOD IS FOR TESTS, DR HUTCHERSON SAID. OF COURSE IT'S FOR TESTS. WHAT THE HELL ELSE WOULD YOU USE IT FOR?



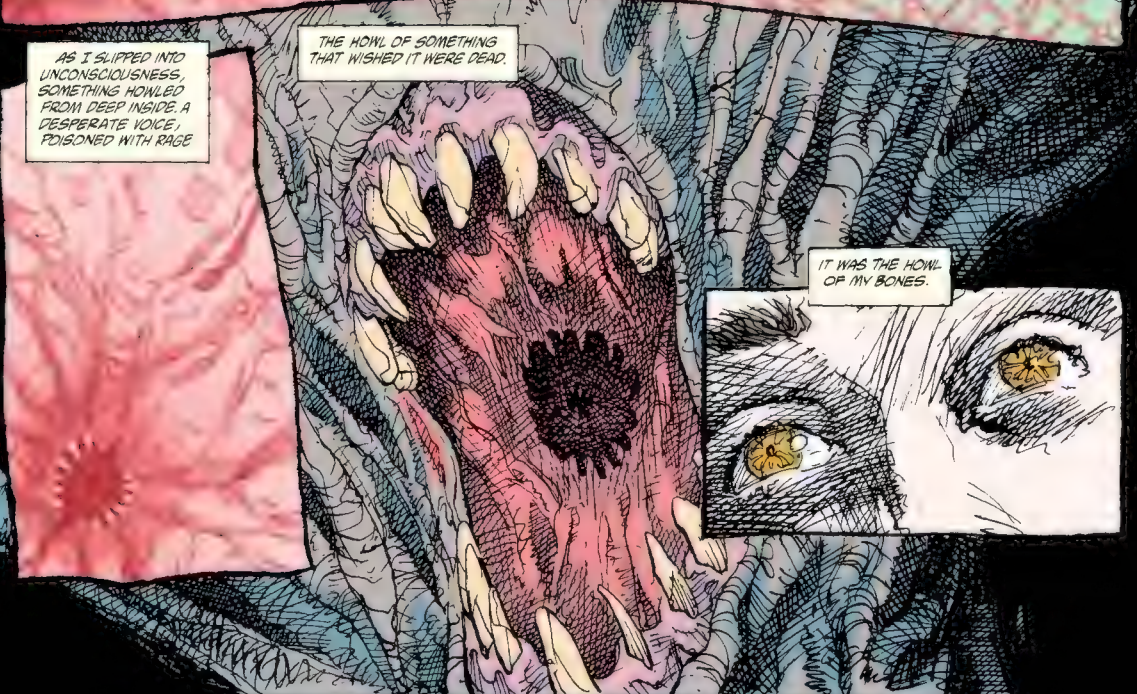
AS SOON AS MY HEAD HIT THE PILLOW, THE DIZZINESS RETURNED. AS THE PAIN GAINED MOMENTUM, I WAS STRUCK WITH THE FEAR THAT IT MIGHT NOT GO AWAY THIS TIME.



THE CAT WAS IN MY GUT AGAIN, CLAWING ITS WAY THROUGH MY STOMACH WALL.



THE ROOM RUSHED AWAY FROM ME, THE CEILING SWOOPED FROM SIDE TO SIDE, A TUNNEL FORMED, LONG AND DARK, DEFEYING ALL THE PETTY LAWS OF PHYSICS.

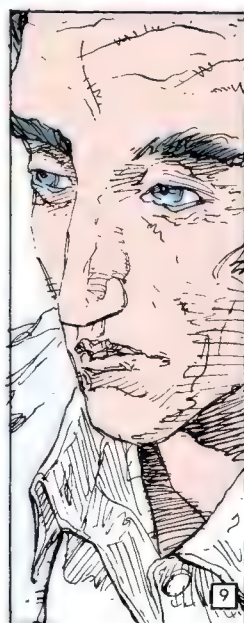
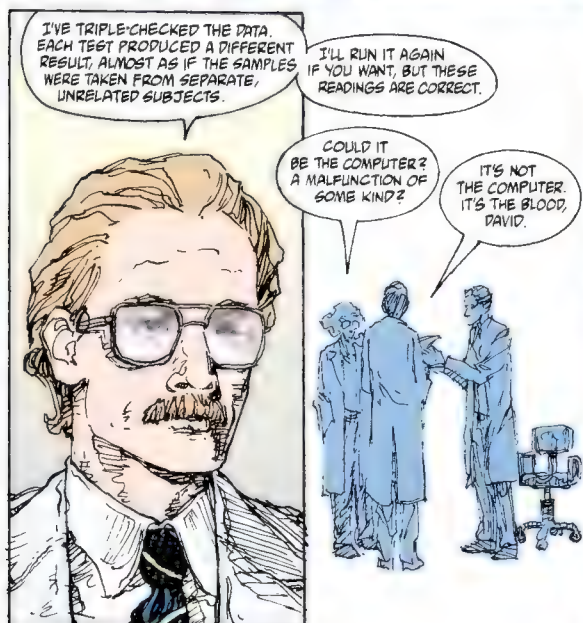
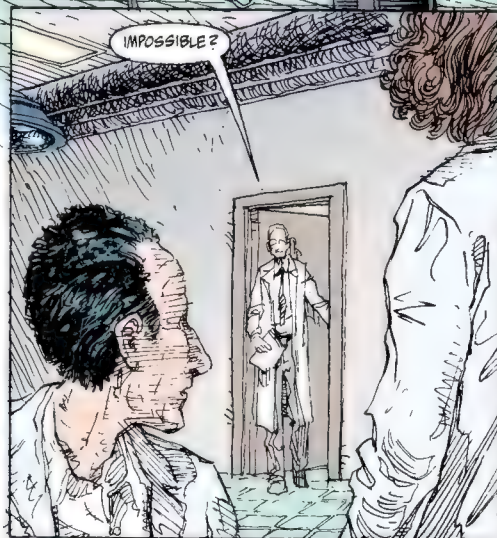
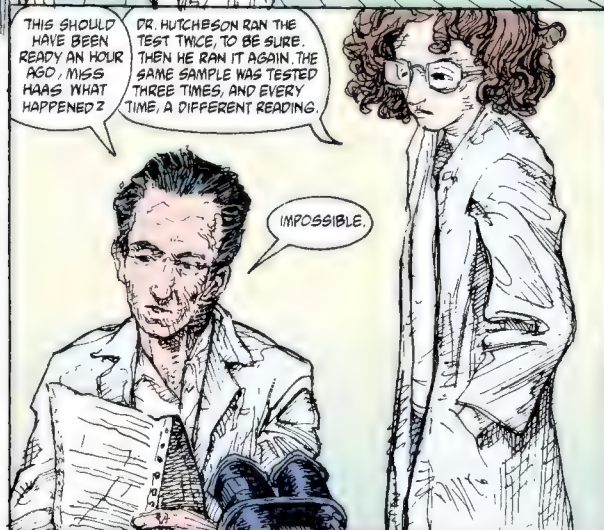
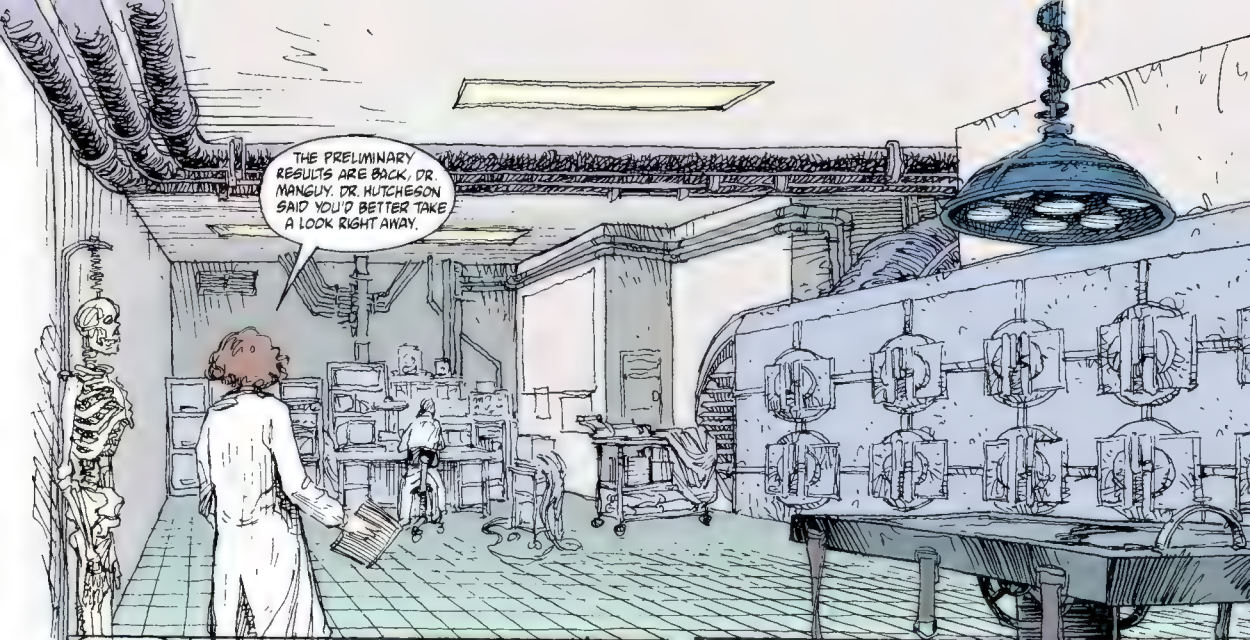


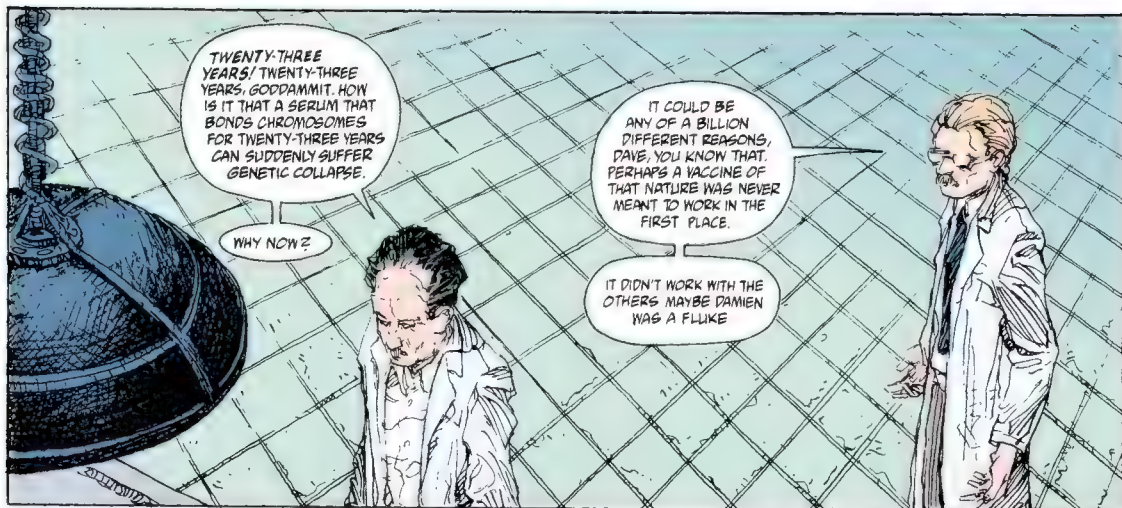
AS I SLIPPED INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS, SOMETHING HOWLED FROM DEEP INSIDE. A DESPERATE VOICE, POISONED WITH RAGE.

THE HOWL OF SOMETHING THAT WISHED IT WERE DEAD.

IT WAS THE HOWL OF MY BONES.







TWENTY-THREE YEARS! TWENTY-THREE YEARS, GODDAMMIT. HOW IS IT THAT A SERUM THAT BONDS CHROMOSOMES FOR TWENTY-THREE YEARS CAN SUDDENLY SUFFER GENETIC COLLAPSE.

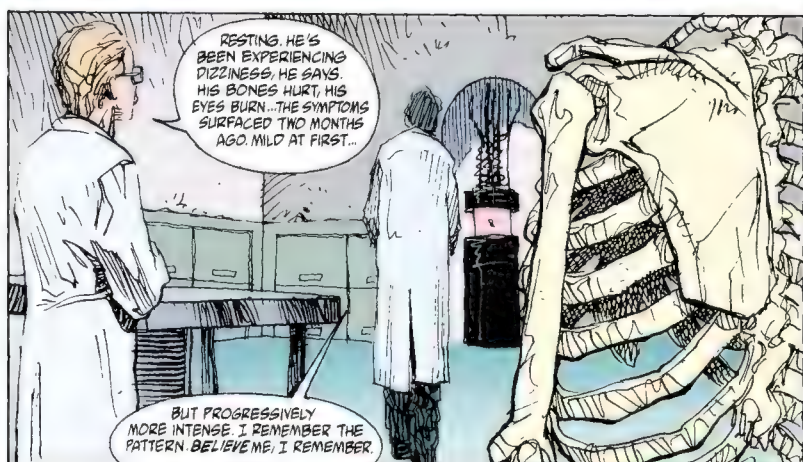
WHY NOW?

IT COULD BE ANY OF A BILLION DIFFERENT REASONS, DAVE, YOU KNOW THAT. PERHAPS A VACCINE OF THAT NATURE WAS NEVER MEANT TO WORK IN THE FIRST PLACE.

IT DIDN'T WORK WITH THE OTHERS. MAYBE DAMIEN WAS A FLUKE.

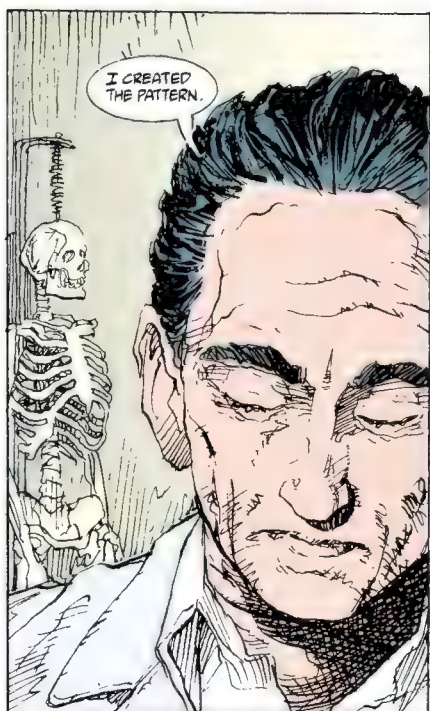


WHERE IS HE NOW?



RESTING. HE'S BEEN EXPERIENCING DIZZINESS, HE SAYS. HIS BONES HURT, HIS EYES BURN...THE SYMPTOMS SURFACED TWO MONTHS AGO, MILD AT FIRST...

BUT PROGRESSIVELY MORE INTENSE. I REMEMBER THE PATTERN BELIEVE ME, I REMEMBER

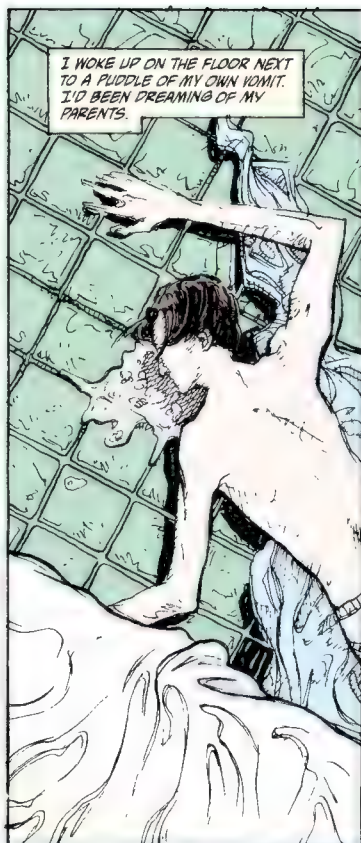


I CREATED THE PATTERN.

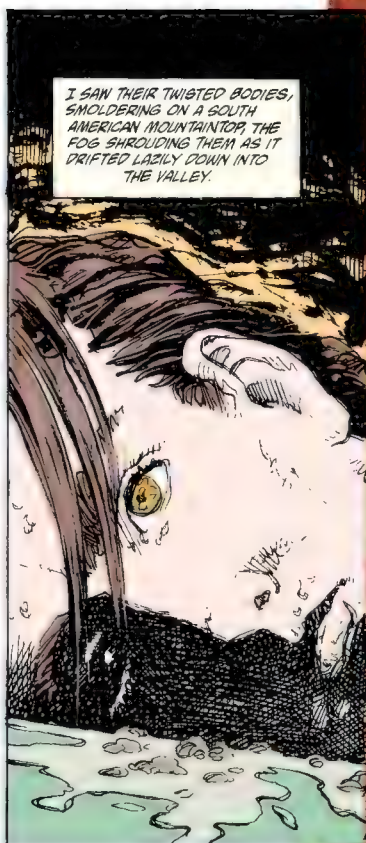


I CREATED THE PAIN.





I WOKE UP ON THE FLOOR NEXT TO A PUDDLE OF MY OWN VOMIT. I'D BEEN DREAMING OF MY PARENTS.



I SAW THEIR TWISTED BODIES, SMOLDERING ON A SOUTH AMERICAN MOUNTAIN TOP. THE FOG SHROUDING THEM AS IT DRIFTED LAZILY DOWN INTO THE VALLEY.



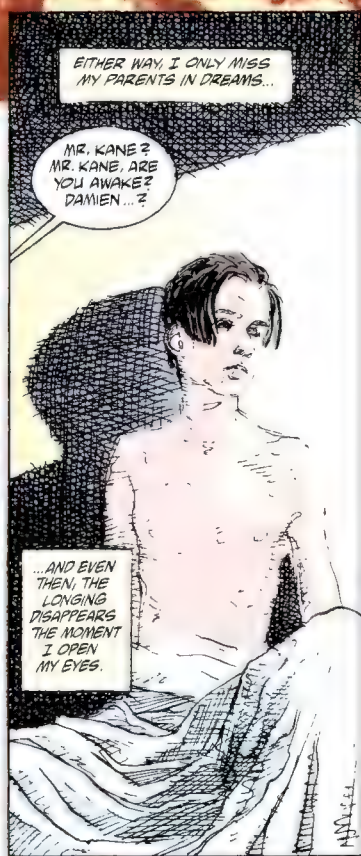
THERE WAS NO ONE ELSE AROUND--NO OTHER VICTIMS. JUST MOM AND DAD BESIDE THE PLANE, SMILING AS THEY BURNED.



AND THEN I WAS BESIDE THEM, FULLY GROWN AND UNARMED. I WANTED TO PUT MY ARMS AROUND THEM, BUT I THOUGHT THEIR MELTING FLESH MIGHT STICK TO ME, SO I JUST KIND OF WAVED INSTEAD.



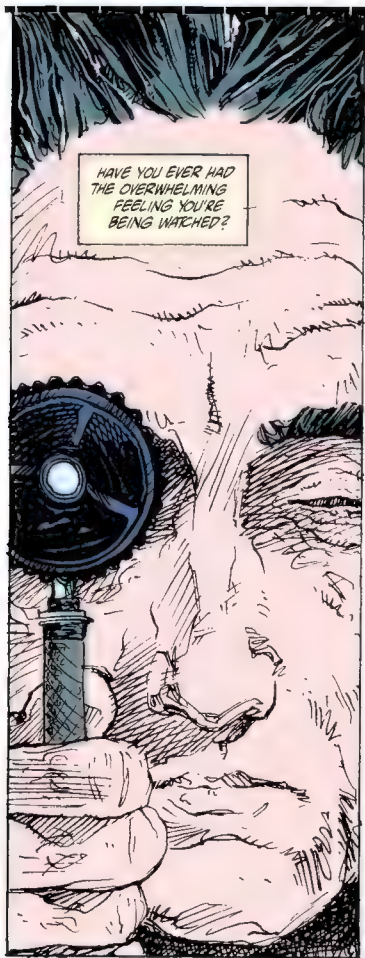
I DON'T KNOW WHY I FELT LIKE HUGGING THESE BURNING PEOPLE. PERHAPS IT WAS THE NOTION OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.



EITHER WAY, I ONLY MISS MY PARENTS IN DREAMS...

MR. KANE?
MR. KANE, ARE YOU AWAKE?
DAMIEN ...?

...AND EVEN THEN, THE LONGING DISAPPEARS THE MOMENT I OPEN MY EYES.



HAVE YOU EVER HAD THE OVERWHELMING FEELING YOU'RE BEING WATCHED?



THE UNSHAKABLE NOTION THAT SOME UNKNOWN PRESENCE HAS YOU IN ITS SIGHTS AND IS WAITING FOR THE RIGHT OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE ITSELF KNOWN?

THAT'S THE FEELING I HAD FROM THE MOMENT I STEPPED OFF THE PLANE, AND AS DR. MANGUY EXAMINED ME, I KNEW THAT WHATEVER IT WAS, IT WAS ABOUT TO POUNCE.



SO WHAT'S THE VERDICT, DOC? DO I TAKE TWO ASPIRIN AND CALL YOU IN THE MORNINGS?

I HOPE YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TAKE ANY MORE BLOOD. I'M ABOUT A QUART LOW AS IT IS.

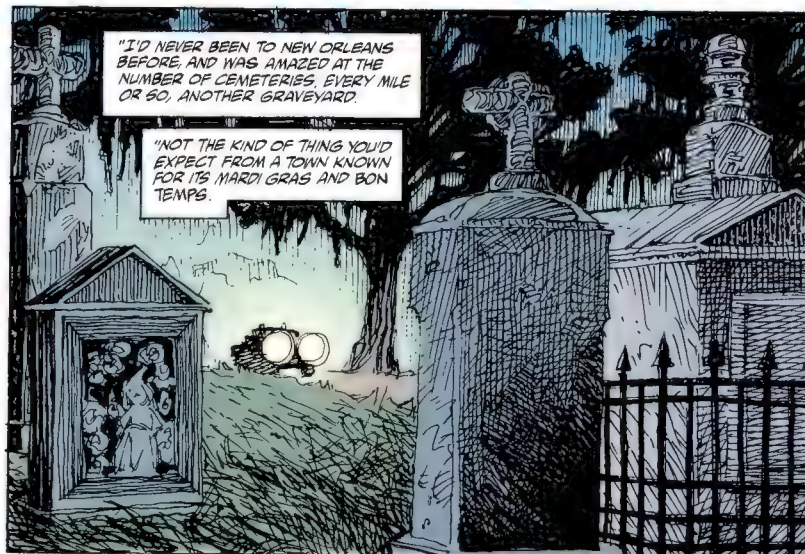
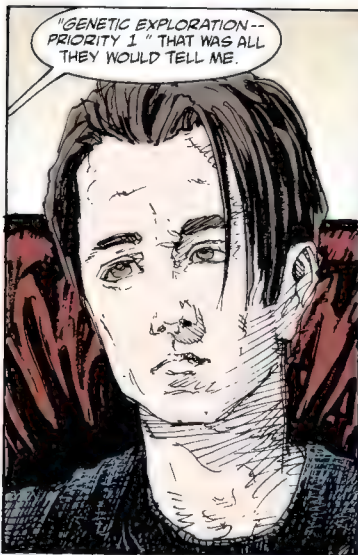
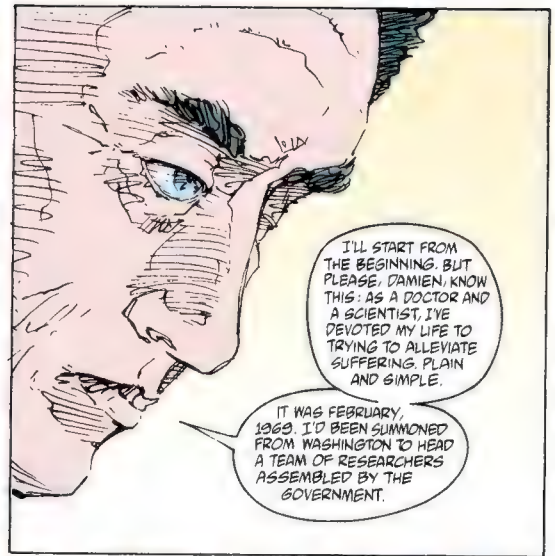
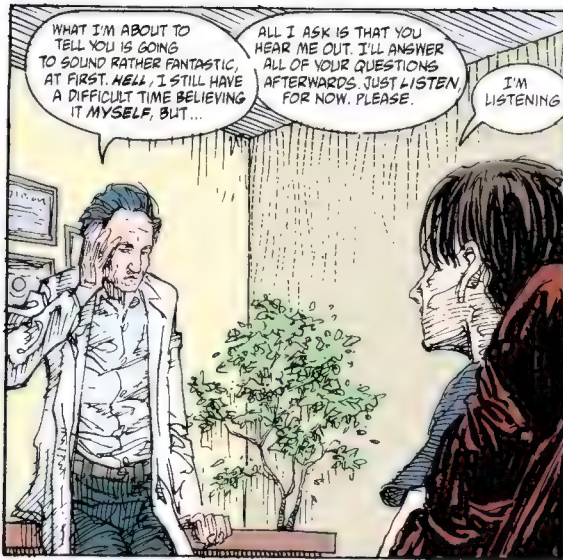


WE NEED TO TALK, DAMIEN. IN MY OFFICE.

I HAD A GIRLFRIEND WHO SAID THAT ONCE WHAT SHE REALLY MEANT WAS, "I'M GOING TO TELL YOU SOMETHING YOU DON'T WANT TO HEAR."



PLEASE, DAMIEN. MY OFFICE.



THEY TOOK ME TO A MAKESHIFT INFIRMARY--AN OLD BARRACKS ON THE GROUNDS OF A DEFUNCT SHOOTING RANGE



NO ONE WOULD TELL ME WHY I WAS BROUGHT THERE OR WHAT THE WHOLE THING WAS ABOUT.



NO ONE PREPARED ME FOR WHAT I WAS ABOUT TO SEE.



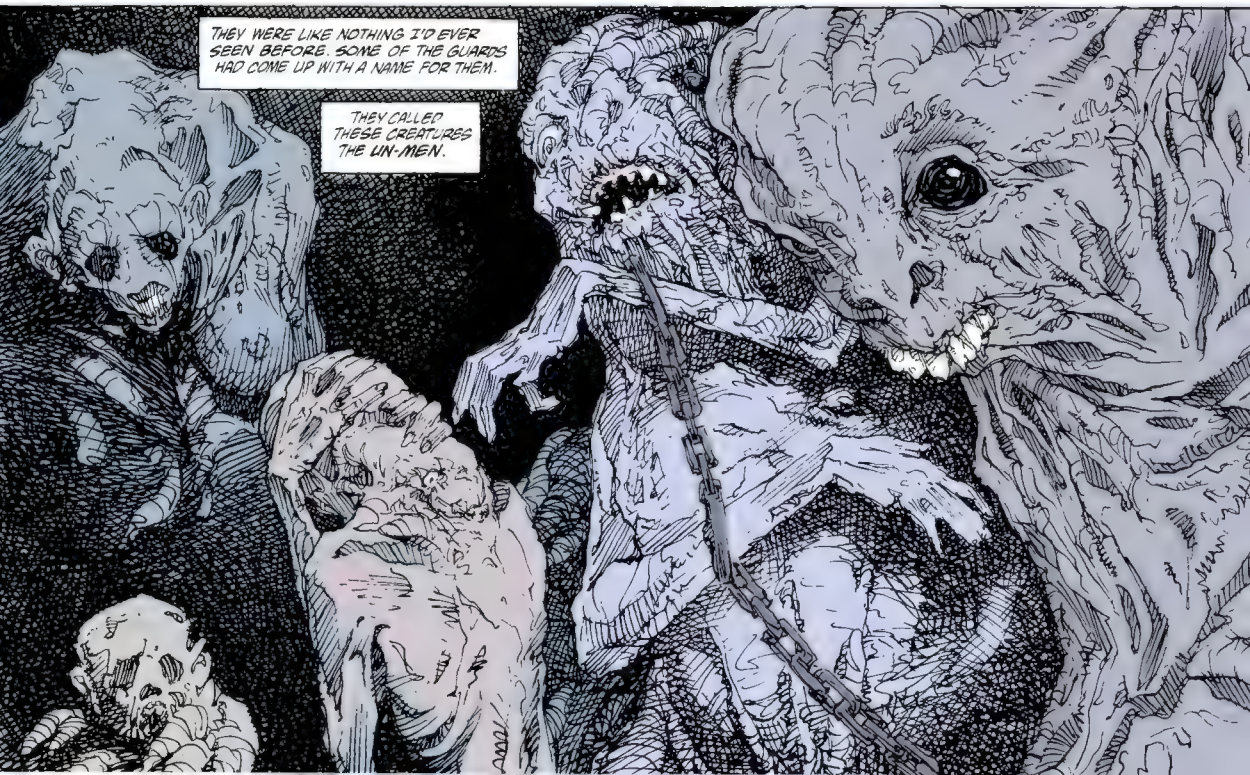
HORRIBLY DISFIGURED SHAPES SHACKLED TO THE WALLS. DEFINITELY NOT HUMAN, HARDLY EVEN ANIMAL. THEY LOOKED AT ME, AND I COULD SEE THE TERROR IN THEIR EYES



IT WAS AS THOUGH THEY THOUGHT I'D COME TO KILL THEM. AND I WANTED TO BE SICK.

THEY WERE LIKE NOTHING I'D EVER SEEN BEFORE. SOME OF THE GUARDS HAD COME UP WITH A NAME FOR THEM.

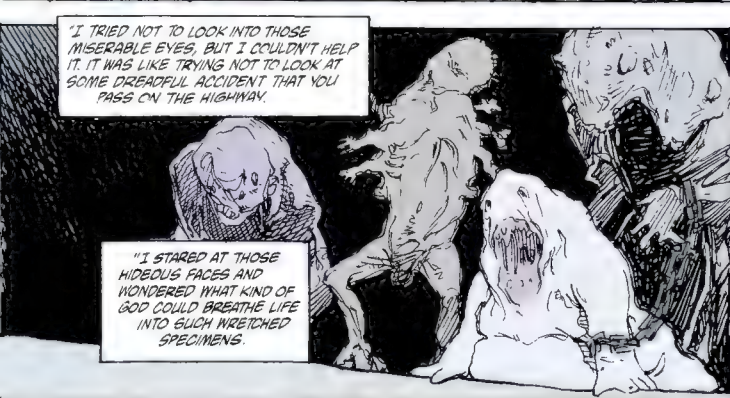
THEY CALLED THESE CREATURES THE UN-MEN.





"THEY'D BEEN CAPTURED DEEP IN THE LOUISIANA SWAMP BY A SPECIAL TACTICS TEAM ON MANEUVERS. WHERE THEY CAME FROM ORIGINALLY WAS ANYBODY'S GUESS, BUT ODDLY ENOUGH, NONE OF THE HIGHER UPS SEEMED OVERLY INTERESTED IN PURSUING THE MATTER.

"MY OWN PERSONAL INQUIRIES WERE MET WITH STONY SILENCE. SOMEONE KNEW MORE THAN THEY WERE LETTING ON. THAT MUCH WAS CLEAR.



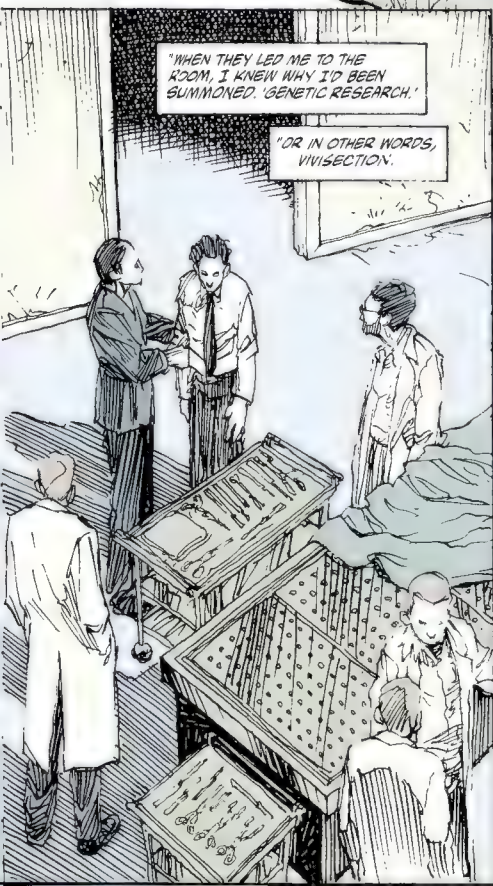
"I TRIED NOT TO LOOK INTO THOSE MISERABLE EYES, BUT I COULDN'T HELP IT. IT WAS LIKE TRYING NOT TO LOOK AT SOME DREADFUL ACCIDENT THAT YOU PASS ON THE HIGHWAY.

"I STARED AT THOSE HORRIBLE FACES AND WONDERED WHAT KIND OF GOD COULD BREATHE LIFE INTO SUCH WRETCHED SPECIMENS.



"THEY DIDN'T SPEAK, BUT I FELT THEIR PAIN.

"AND THERE'S NO MISTAKING THE LOOK OF HATRED IN THE EYES OF A CREATURE IN CHAINS.

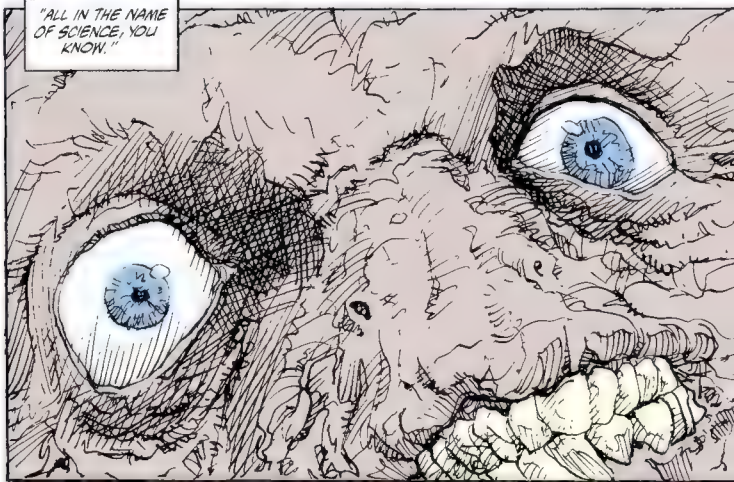


"WHEN THEY LED ME TO THE ROOM, I KNEW WHY I'D BEEN SUMMONED. 'GENETIC RESEARCH.'

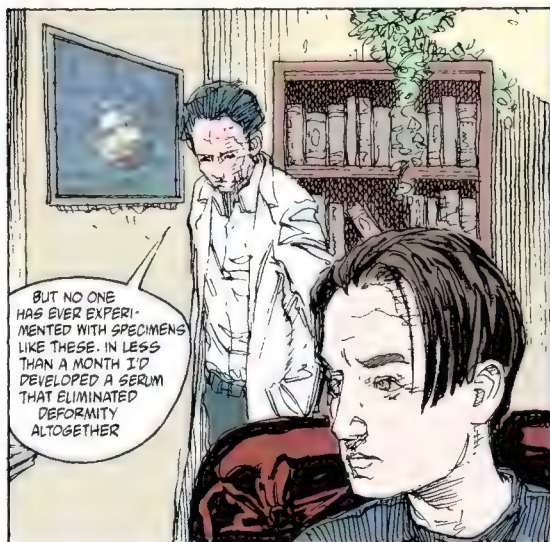
"OR IN OTHER WORDS, VIVISECTION.



"WHATEVER ANSWERS THEY WERE LOOKING FOR WOULD SURELY INVOLVE SCREAMING, AND I MANAGED TO CONVINCE MYSELF THAT THE PROJECT WAS SOMEHOW JUSTIFIABLE.



"ALL IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE, YOU KNOW."





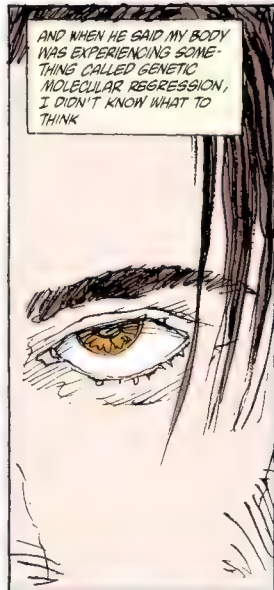
I LISTENED FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE WEEKS. WILD TALES OF TEST TUBE MUTANTS, AND GOVERNMENT PROCREATION...

IT ALL SOUNDED LIKE SOMETHING YOU'D HEAR AROUND A CAMPFIRE AS A KID.

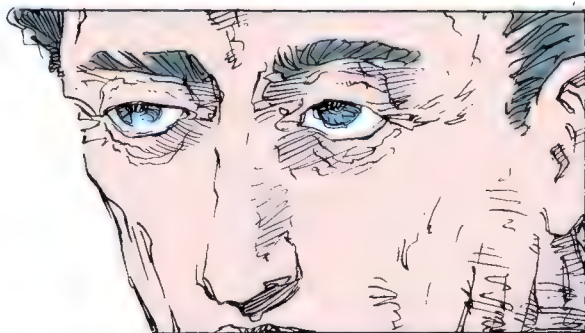


BUT MANGUY WASN'T KIDDING, AND I SUDDENLY FELT AS THOUGH I'D LOST CONTROL OVER ANYTHING THAT WAS REAL.

WHEN HE TOLD ME OF THE CREATURES THEY'D FOUND IN THE SWAMP, I WANTED TO LAUGH. WHEN HE EXPLAINED HOW HIS "SERUM" WAS MEANT TO CURE DEFORMITIES, I WANTED TO SPIT IN HIS FACE.



AND WHEN HE SAID MY BODY WAS EXPERIENCING SOMETHING CALLED GENETIC MOLECULAR REGRESSION, I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK.



I KNOW IT SOUNDS FANTASTIC, BUT IT'S ALL TRUE, AND I'M TO BLAME. I DIDN'T COUNT ON YOUR BODY CHEMISTRY COUNTERACTING THE SERUM AFTER TWENTY-THREE YEARS.

IF I'D HAD ANY INDICATION... YOU PROBABLY WOULDN'T BE HERE TODAY.



MY JOB, NOW, IS TO FIND AN AGENT THAT WILL HALT THE REVERSAL... IF IT CAN BE HALTED.

NO OFFENSE, BUT I'M HAVING A TOUGH TIME BELIEVING ANY OF THIS, DOC. YOU'RE SAYING I WAS NEVER HUMAN-- THAT YOU "MADE" ME? COME ON.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IF SOMEONE TOLD YOU THE SAME THING?



I PROBABLY WOULDN'T BELIEVE IT, EITHER.

BUT WHAT I'VE SAID IS TRUE. I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU TO BELIEVE IT, SO I'VE ARRANGED TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING THAT YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO SEE.

THEN I DON'T THINK I WANT TO SEE IT.

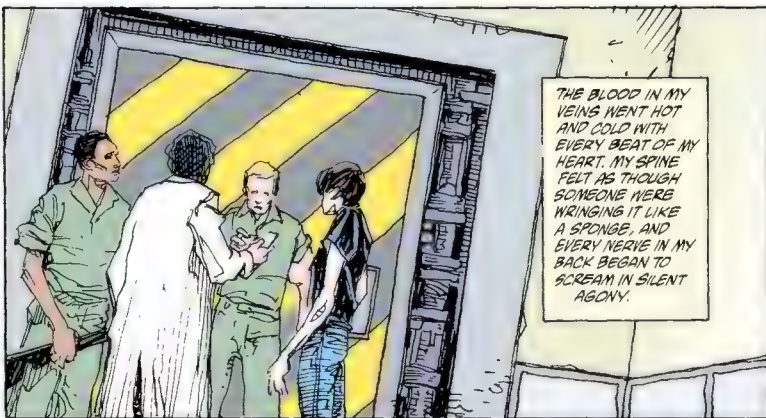


IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU BELIEVE ME, DAMIEN. YOU HAVE TO KNOW THE TRUTH.

I'M TAKING YOU TO YOUR PARENTS.



WE DESCENDED A SERIES OF ANTISEPTIC STAIRWAYS, AND ONCE AGAIN I SENSED I WAS BEING WATCHED.



THE BLOOD IN MY VEINS WENT HOT AND COLD WITH EVERY BEAT OF MY HEART. MY SPINE FELT AS THOUGH SOMEONE WERE WRINGING IT LIKE A SPONGE, AND EVERY NERVE IN MY BACK BEGAN TO SCREAM IN SILENT AGONY.



TELL ME, DOC, ARE THOSE GUYS REAL, OR DID YOU MAKE THEM TOO?



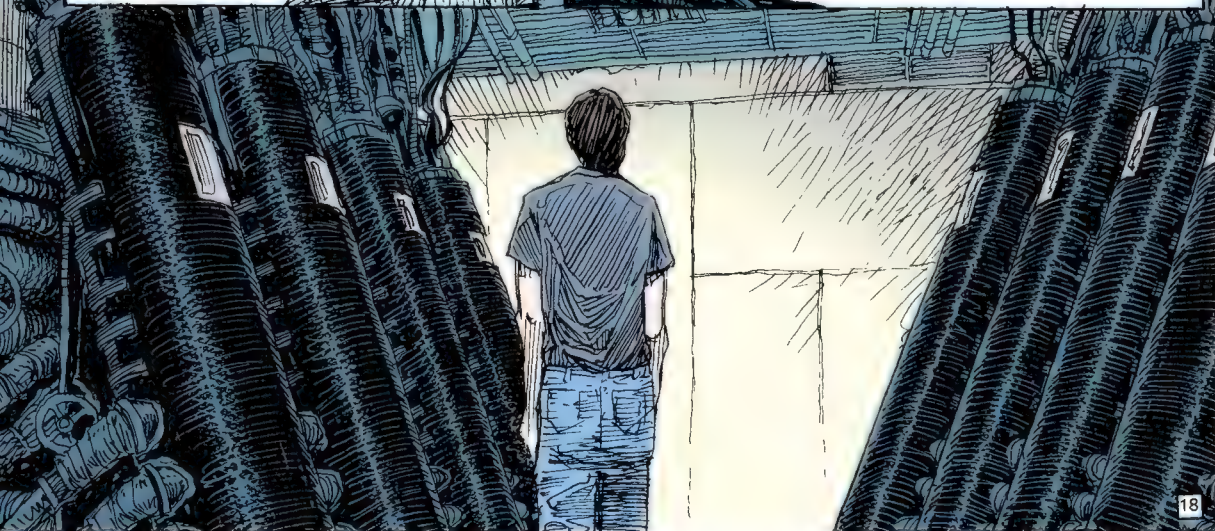
THEY'VE BEEN HERE MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS. TWO DECADES OF FROZEN PEACE. THE ENVIRONMENT OF EACH INDIVIDUAL CHAMBER IS REGULATED AND CONTROLLED BY A CENTRAL COMPUTER.

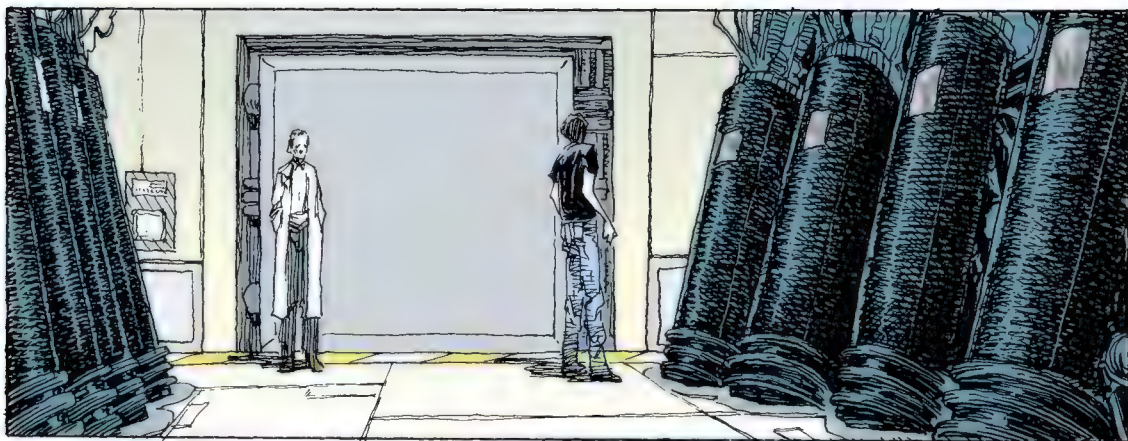


I MUST WARN YOU, DAMIEN, THIS WON'T BE PLEASANT. AND PLEASE, DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING.

"YOU BREAK IT, YOU BOUGHT IT," HUH?

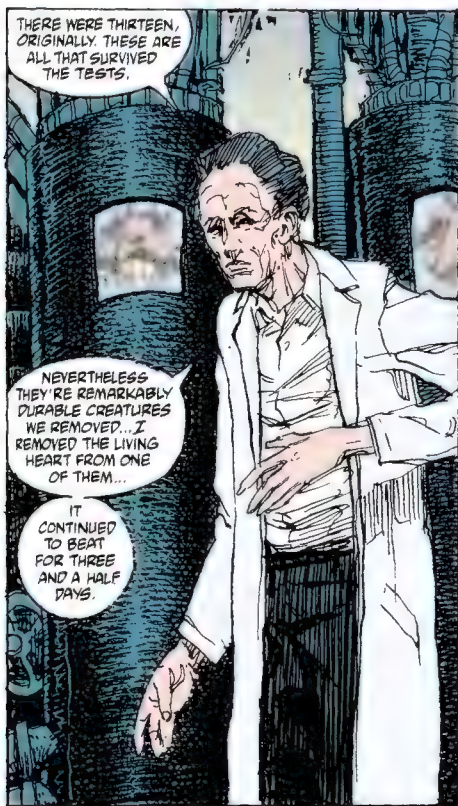
CLACK!





LOOK
CLOSELY,
DAMIEN.

THESE
ARE YOUR
ANCESTORS



THERE WERE THIRTEEN,
ORIGINALLY. THESE ARE
ALL THAT SURVIVED
THE TESTS.

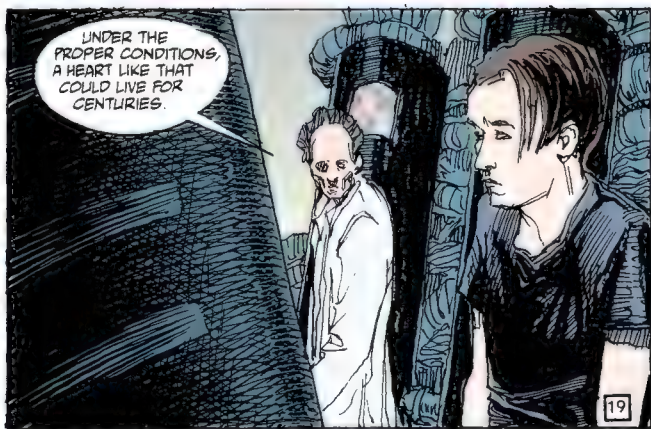
NEVERTHELESS
THEY'RE REMARKABLY
DURABLE CREATURES
WE REMOVED... I
REMOVED THE LIVING
HEART FROM ONE
OF THEM...

IT
CONTINUED
TO BEAT
FOR THREE
AND A HALF
DAYS.



A HEART SO
TENACIOUS IT CAN
SURVIVE WITHOUT
A BODY.

THREE
AND A HALF
DAYS,
DAMIEN.



UNDER THE
PROPER CONDITIONS,
A HEART LIKE THAT
COULD LIVE FOR
CENTURIES.



AND MY PARENTS? WHICH ONES DO I CALL MOM AND DAD?

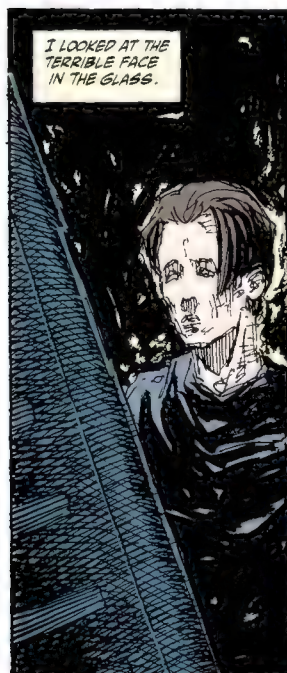
THEY'RE HERE, DAMIEN.



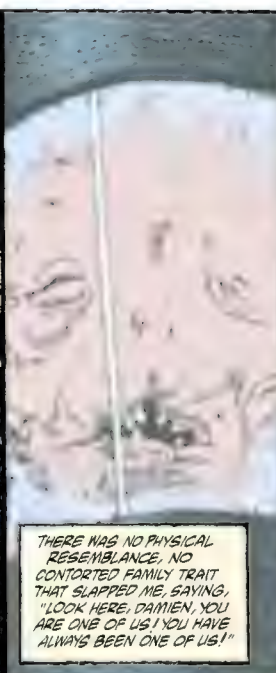
THE FEMALES ON THE LEFT, THE MALE ON THE RIGHT.

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, DOC, I STILL DON'T BELIEVE ANY OF THIS.

WELL, FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, I WISH TO GOD IT WEREN'T THE TRUTH.



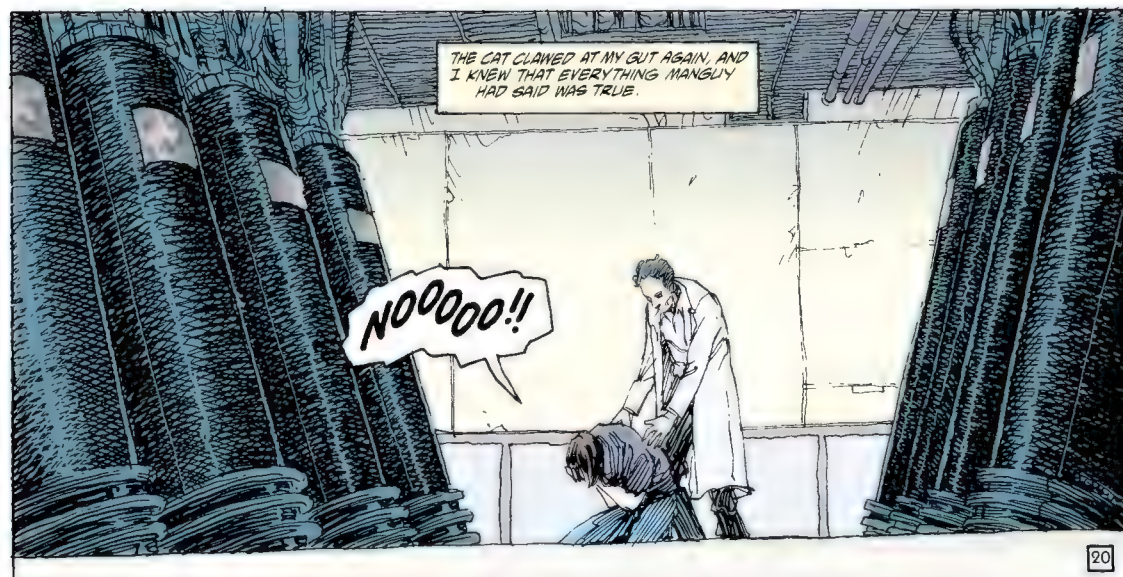
I LOOKED AT THE TERRIBLE FACE IN THE GLASS.



THERE WAS NO PHYSICAL RESEMBLANCE, NO CONTORTED FAMILY TRAIT THAT SLAPPED ME, SAYING, "LOOK HERE, DAMIEN, YOU ARE ONE OF US! YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ONE OF US!"

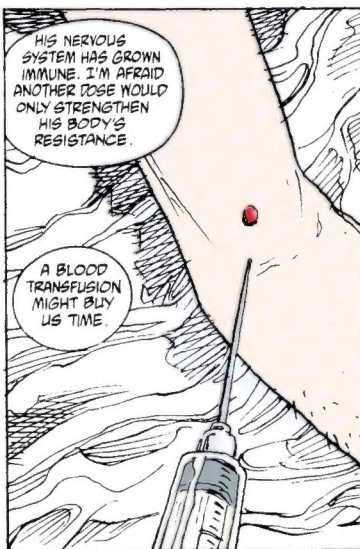
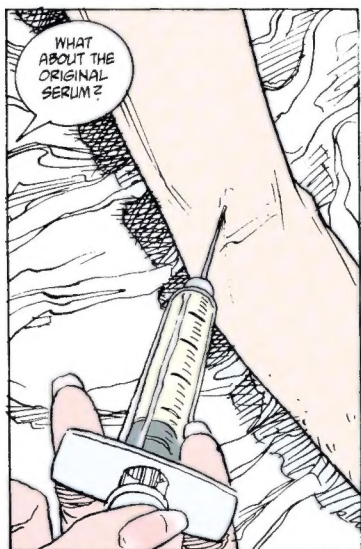
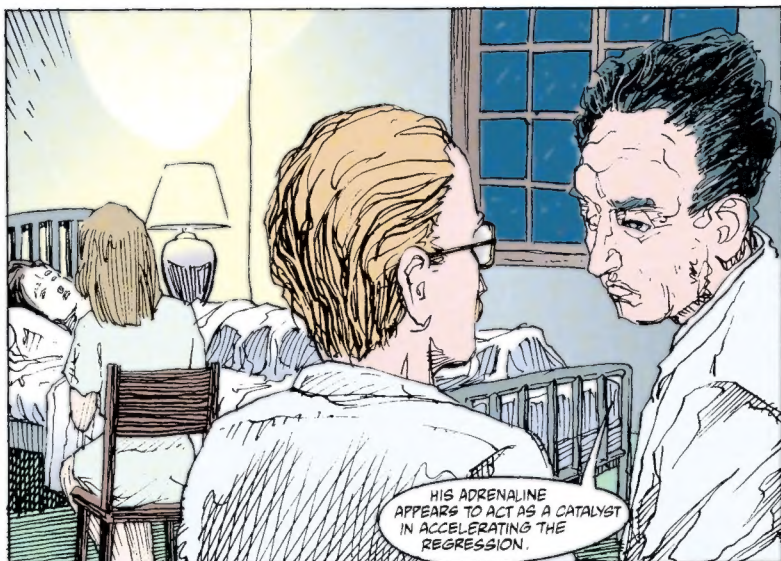


THERE WAS ONLY THE SUDDEN PAIN THAT COMES WHEN YOU REALIZE HOW LITTERLY ALONE YOU HAVE BEEN FOR SO MANY YEARS, AND HOW NOTHING YOU DO CAN CHANGE THE FACT THAT THINGS WILL ONLY GET WORSE.



THE CAT CLAWED AT MY GUT AGAIN, AND I KNEW THAT EVERYTHING MANGUY HAD SAID WAS TRUE.

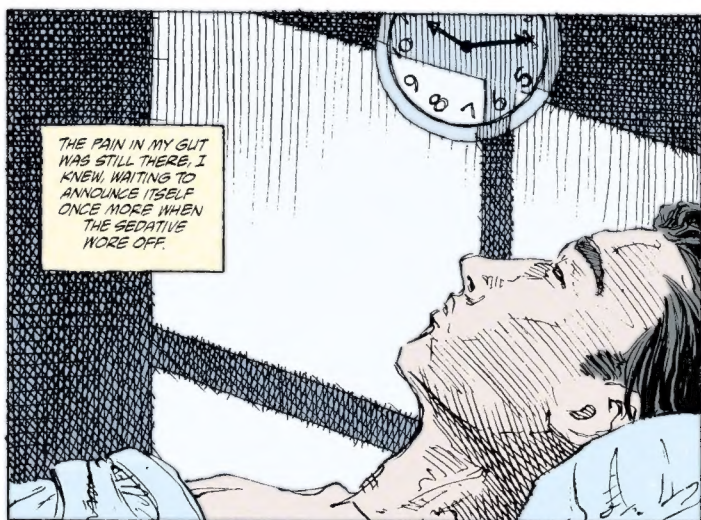
NOOOOO!!



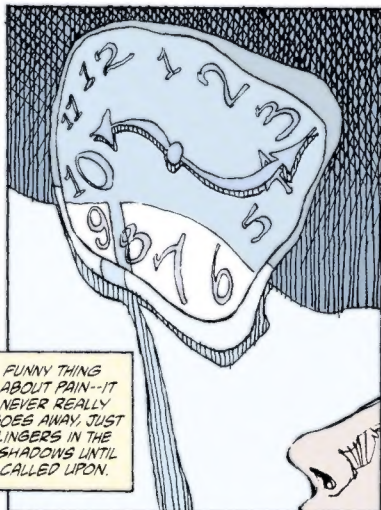


THE VOICES DISAPPEARED
DOWN THE HALL, AND THE
DARKNESS FELT DEAD IN
THE AIR.

THE ENTIRE NIGHT LOOKED DEAD;
THE BLACK SKY STIFF AND COLD
ABOVE DESOLATE CLOUDS. IT WAS
HARD TO IMAGINE THERE WAS
DAYLIGHT IN ANOTHER PART OF
THE WORLD.



THE PAIN IN MY GUT
WAS STILL THERE, I
KNEW, WAITING TO
ANNOUNCE ITSELF
ONCE MORE WHEN
THE SEDATIVE
WORE OFF.



FUNNY THING
ABOUT PAIN--IT
NEVER REALLY
GOES AWAY, JUST
LINGERS IN THE
SHADOWS UNTIL
CALLED UPON.

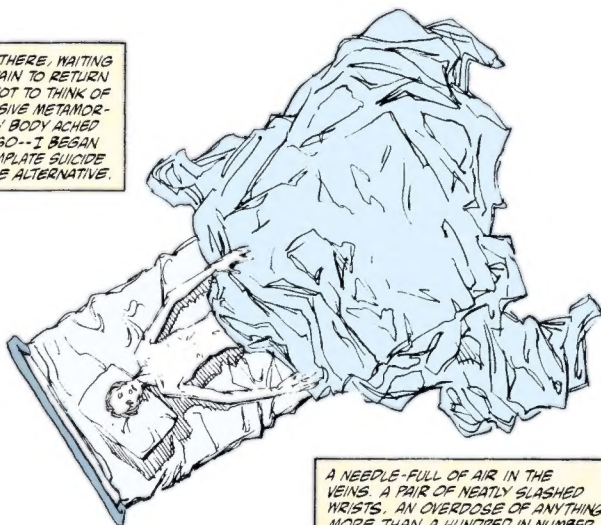


WAITING AND WAITING, ALL
THE TIME IN THE WORLD...
NEVER TIRING, NEVER BORED...



NEVER
DREAMING OF
ABANDONING
YOU.

AS I LAY THERE, WAITING FOR THE PAIN TO RETURN --TRYING NOT TO THINK OF THE REPULSIVE METAMORPHOSIS MY BODY ACHED TO UNDERGO-- I BEGAN TO CONTEMPLATE SUICIDE AS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE.



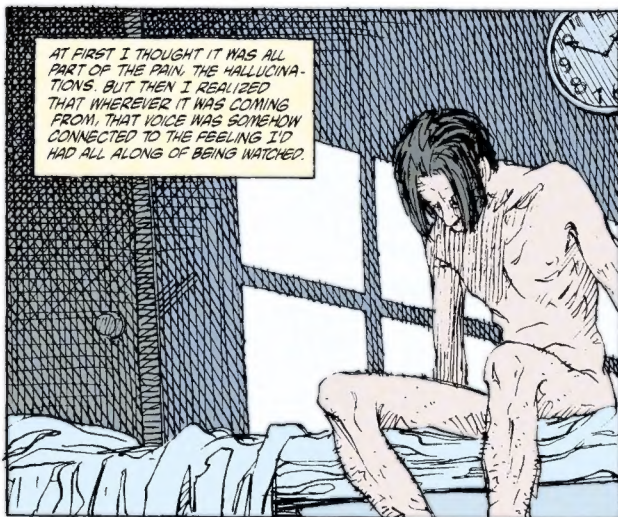
A NEEDLE-FULL OF AIR IN THE VEINS. A PAIR OF NEATLY SLASHED WRISTS. AN OVERDOSE OF ANYTHING MORE THAN A HUNDRED IN NUMBER...

THAT WAS WHEN I HEARD THE VOICE.

IT SAID, "COME TO ME, DAMIEN. I'M HERE. COME."

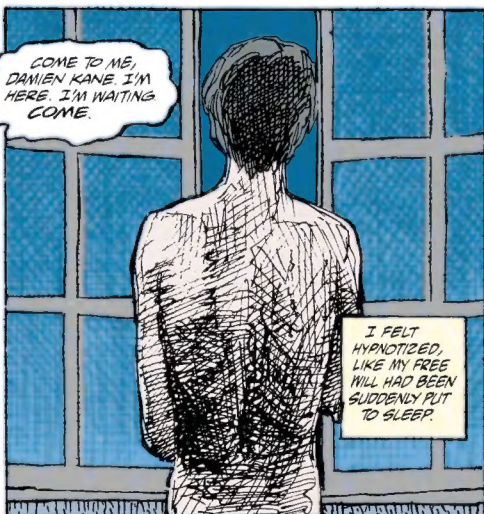


AT FIRST I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL PART OF THE PAIN, THE HALLUCINATIONS. BUT THEN I REALIZED THAT WHEREVER IT WAS COMING FROM, THAT VOICE WAS SOMEHOW CONNECTED TO THE FEELING I'D HAD ALL ALONG OF BEING WATCHED.

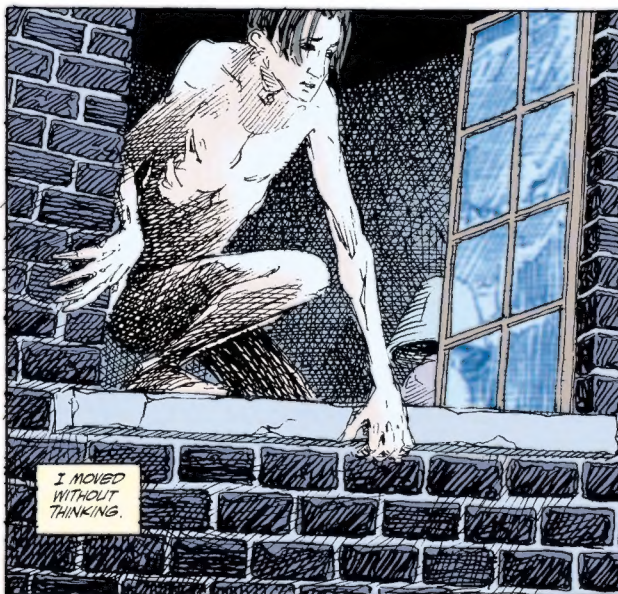


COME TO ME, DAMIEN KANE. I'M HERE. I'M WAITING COME.

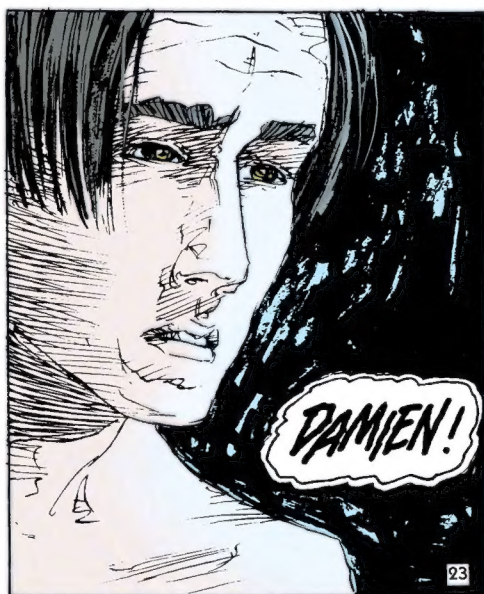
I FELT HYPNOTIZED, LIKE MY FREE WILL HAD BEEN SUDDENLY PUT TO SLEEP.



I MOVED WITHOUT THINKING.

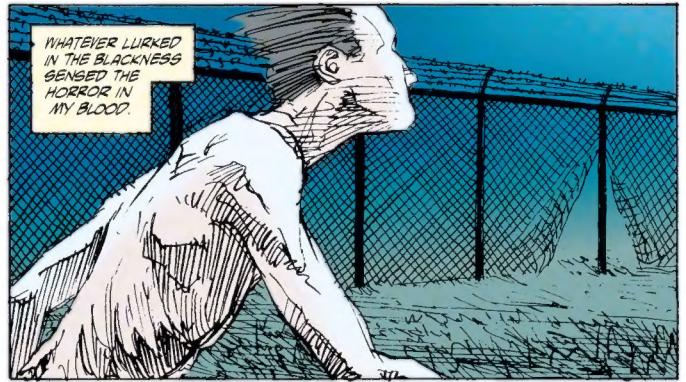


DAMIEN!





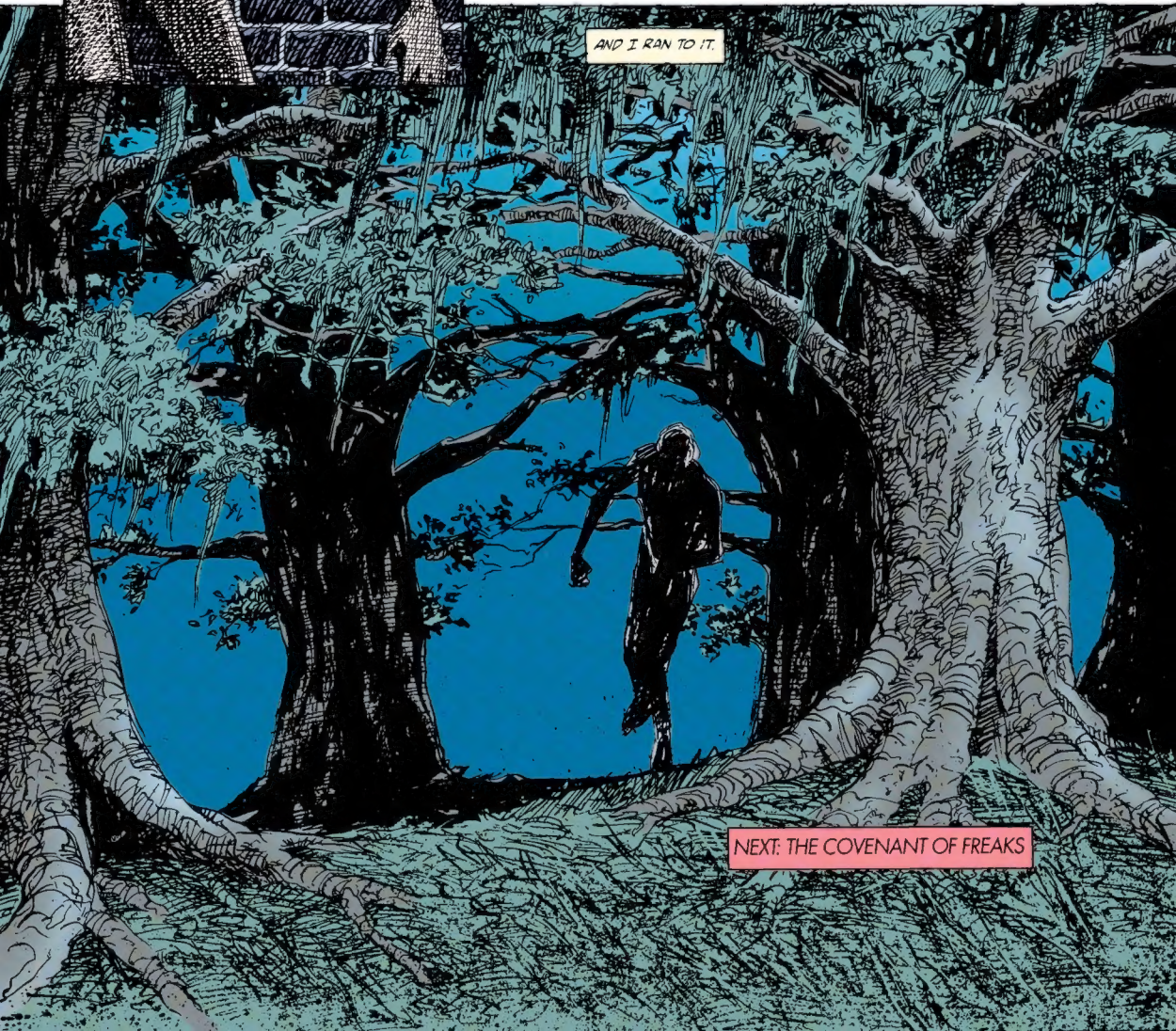
AND I
KNEW...



WHATEVER LURKED
IN THE BLACKNESS
SENSED THE
HORROR IN
MY BLOOD.



WHATEVER BECKONED
ME WANTED TO KEEP
ME ALIVE.



AND I RAN TO IT.

NEXT: THE COVENANT OF FREAKS